

Your Bill of Rights as a Residential Water Utility Customer

The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSC) prepared this brochure to let you know your rights as a water customer. It includes answers to your most common questions and concerns. If you have a question or problem with your service, first contact your utility. If your utility cannot solve the problem, call the PSC.

What Is On Your Bill

All water utility bills may include:

1. Account number.
2. Billing address.
3. Service address (if not the same as the billing address).
4. Current meter reading and date.
5. Prior meter reading and date.
6. Number of units consumed.
7. Minimum and estimated bills shall be distinctly marked as such.
8. The date on which the utility bill is due.
9. The rate schedule under which the bill was computed.
10. Late payment charges.

If the rate schedule is not included with the bill, the utility must provide a copy of the rate schedule to all customers whenever a rate change becomes effective and at least once each year.

Late Payment Charges

A utility can add a late payment charge if your bill has not been received by the utility by the due date printed on your bill.

A late payment charge can be:

1. A one-time charge of 3 percent of current unpaid charges (minimum of 50 cents), or
2. A monthly charge of up to 1 percent of the total unpaid balance (including unpaid late payment charges).

A Deposit May Be Required

If you are a new residential customer, you may be asked to post a deposit if you did not pay an undisputed bill for gas, electric, or water service anywhere in Wisconsin during the last six years; and your income is above 200 percent of federal poverty guidelines.

If you are a current residential customer, you may be asked to post a deposit if:

- a. Your service has been shut off during the last 12 months.
- b. You falsified a service application.

Installment Plans For Overdue Bills

You may enter into an installment plan to pay what you owe your utility. This helps you pay your current bills and any overdue bills. You will be asked to make a “reasonable down payment” and “reasonable installments.”

A reasonable amount is based on:

1. Your ability to pay.
2. The size of your overdue bill.
3. How long your bill has been overdue.
4. Your payment history.
5. Reasons your bill is overdue.
6. Other important factors.

Your utility will ask you to sign an installment agreement. Do not sign it unless you agree to the terms. You have a right to negotiate an installment agreement.

If you do not pay installments as agreed, the utility may shut off your service. If you do not pay, the utility does not have to negotiate an agreement before it shuts off your service. It is up to you to let the utility know about important reasons to negotiate a new plan.

If you and the utility cannot agree on an installment plan, you can file a dispute with the PSC. While the PSC investigates and attempts to resolve your dispute, your service should not be shut off. However, you must pay all bills not in dispute.

Service Shut-offs

A utility must either send or personally serve you with a notice before your service is shut off.

This notice must include:

1. Date of notice.
2. Reason for shut off.
3. Date when service can be shut off.
4. If feasible, the occupants may apply to the utility to accept responsibility for future bills and avoid disconnection of service.
5. How to contact the utility about the shut off.

The notice must be sent to your home or mailing address at least 10 days before the shut off. If the billing address is different from the service address, notice shall be posted at the service address not less than five days before disconnection. The utility is required to make a reasonable effort to contact you by telephone or in person before service is shut off.

If service is not shut off within 20 days after the notice is mailed, the utility must leave a new notice at the site not less than 24 hours nor more than 48 hours prior to disconnection.

A utility may disconnect utility service without notice where a dangerous condition exists for as long as it exists.

Service may be disconnected with a written 24-hour notice for nonpayment of a bill covering theft of water.

Your service **cannot** be shut off if:

1. You fail to pay for merchandise or nonutility service.
2. You fail to pay for a different type of utility service.
3. There is a declared heat advisory, warning, or emergency for your area.

Your service **can** be shut off if:

1. You fail to pay your bills, including delinquent bills from a previous address.
2. You fail to pay installments as agreed.
3. You fail to post required deposits.
4. You tamper with your meter.
5. There is a safety hazard.
6. You refuse or fail to allow for a meter reading at least once every four months where the utility bills monthly or bimonthly or at least once every nine months where the utility bills quarterly.

Medical Problems

For extra time to make payment arrangements, the utility will delay service shut off up to 21 days if there is a medical problem or other emergency. The utility may ask for a letter regarding the illness from your doctor, a public health official, a social service official, the police, or sheriff. The letter must specify the medical illness, the need for water, and the expected duration of the emergency. It is also possible to extend the 21-day delay.

Delinquent Bills Levied As A Tax

Delinquent municipal utility bills may be levied as a tax as provided in s. 66.0809(3), Stats.

Have A Dispute?

First contact your utility to try to solve the problem. If you are behind on your bill, the utility may offer you an installment plan to pay your bill.

If the utility cannot solve your problem, contact the PSC at 1-800-225-7729 or (608) 266-2001. While the PSC reviews your dispute, your service should not be shut off. However, you must still promptly pay any charge not in dispute. After the PSC completes its review, a staff member will contact you and your utility and will attempt to find an agreement that is acceptable to both parties.

Bilingual Service - Servicio Bilingüe

The PSC is also able to provide customer assistance in Spanish. When calling the PSC, please ask to speak to a Spanish speaking representative.

En la Comisión de Servicios Públicos del estado de Wisconsin (PSC) podemos asistirles en Español. Cuando llame a la PSC, pida hablar con un representante de habla hispana.

The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin does not discriminate on the basis of disability in the provision of programs, services, or employment. If you are speech, hearing, or visually impaired and need assistance, call (608) 266-5481 or TTY (608) 267-1479. We will try to find another way to get the information to you in a usable form.

Fax (608) 266-3957
TTY (608) 267-1479
Consumer Affairs (800) 225-7729
General (608) 266-5481
Email PSCRECS@PSC.STATE.WI.US
Web Site <http://psc.wi.gov>
610 N. Whitney Way
PO Box 7854
Madison, Wisconsin 53707-7854

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**Public Service Commission
of Wisconsin**